Pyre-Related Material in Inhumation Graves

Investigating Traces of Viking Age Biritualism in South-Western Scania

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Abstract

The article discusses and briefly describes the inclusion of cremated remains in the inhumation burials dating to the Viking Age discovered in six locations in south-western Scania. Previous interpretations, linking the material to human funerary sacrifice and the cult of Odin, are discussed. A new perspective is proposed, focusing on the transformative nature of the burial and on its role in establishing the identities of the mourners, with special attention directed towards New Kinship studies. Ideas for further research are presented.

Introduction

One of the few aspects of Scandinavian Viking Age burial ritual that most researchers agree upon is its large variety (Svanberg 2003b; Price 2008, 257 f.; Price 2010, 124; Lund 2013, 48; Price 2014, 178; Williams 2016, 401 f.). Both cremation and inhumation seem to have been practised throughout the peninsula (Gräslund & Müller-Wille 1992, 186; Price 2014, 178; Lund & Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, 424) conforming to regional patterns displaying differences in frequency between both burial rites (Stylegar 2007, 87). Burial practices of the societies inhabiting Scandinavia in the Late Iron Age have taken a range of forms, including chamber graves, boat burials, cremation layers, burials in urns and coffins as well as in other forms of containers or without them, with additional variables such as the presence of a stone setting, wooden post or a burial mound. Researchers point out that the number of excavated burials is far too low to suffice for the whole population of the area throughout the period, which suggests that other forms of disposing of the dead had to exist (Eriksen *et al*. 2009, 146; Price 2008, 259; Price 2014, 178).

This article is concerned with 44 monuments that combine inhumation burial with materials that could derive from a funeral pyre, such as cremated human and animal remains, charcoal and soot deposits and charred wood. The burials were located on six different sites discovered in the region of south-western Scania. It is believed that inhumation was a dominant burial rite in the area, as in Zealand and other regions of

eastern Denmark (Svanberg 2003b, 97), from which almost identical graves displaying a mix of pyre-related material are known (Brøndsted 1936; Andersen 1960; Eriksen 1992; Jønsson 1992; Kelinminger 1993; Lindblom 1993; Grøn *et al*. 1994; Wulf Andersen 1995; Ulriksen 2011). The practice, even if often noticed, has not been subjected to detailed description or interpretation. The aim of the study is to introduce the material to the broader public and analyse how the cremation deposits were created, mainly through study of the recorded stratigraphy of the burials. Additionally I will attempt to discuss their previous interpretations and introduce new ways of looking at the material.

The study focuses on burials dating to the Viking Age for two reasons – first, is the most unfortunate fact that modestly equipped graves, such as those described in the article, are seldom a subject of any in-depth study, with researchers focusing on extravagant and lavish burial forms such as chamber graves or boat graves, with the notable exception of works by archaeologists such as Ulriksen (2011), Artelius (2000), Pétursdóttir (2009) and Svanberg (2003a & b). It is important to recognize that knowledge about the Viking Age mortuary customs so far has been built on a very limited amount of burial contexts (Back Danielsson 2007, 27). Many graves receive a brief description in an excavation report, never to be studied again, and the material is seldom subjected to an analysis that goes beyond cherry-picking examples across regional boundaries. The second reason for confining the study to this particular time period was that most of the described contexts in which such remains had been found are dated to the Viking Age, and therefore I decided that it is most pertinent to present the study of examples of the practices from south-western Scania dating to this period. It is, however, necessary to state that it might have started in the earlier parts of the Iron Age, as some burials from sites included in this study may suggest.

The application of new theoretical perspectives that are mindful of the modern western foundations of archaeology (Thomas 2004), can present those modest contexts as deserving of further research. The analysis is conducted on the documentation of contexts excavated several years ago and it is preliminary in its nature. However, it can provide a new perspective on burial rituals in the final period of the Late Iron Age and establish a new research agenda that concerns essential questions about the nature of the past people's personhood.

Theory and method

The archaeology of death and burial for a long time was concerned with themes of social structure – it was assumed that burials reflected the structure in a rather straightforward manner, with beliefs that the social persona of the deceased and its ability to control people was symbolized and reflected by the economic expenditure of work and resources in the burial (Brown 1981, 28). Modern studies recognize the transformative nature of the funeral (Oestigaard 2000, 42; Ekengren 2006, 109; Oestigaard 2006, 17; Back Danielsson 2007, 250; Mansurd 2006; 133; Williams 2008, 240), highlighting the fact that the social identity of both the deceased and mourners was established during the process. Social identities must be viewed as ever changing (Jenkins 2008) and existing as a product of networks of social relations between people (Brück 2004, 311; Oestigaard 2006 14; Graham 2009, 52), ever so often including the dead. The grave monuments should be viewed as a group effort to fix and communicate the established identities (Oestigaard 2000, 53; Williams 2006, 26; Ekengren & Nilsson Stutz 2009, 12;

Graham 2009, 51). The deceased, possessing physical qualities and, quite possibly, acting as a focal point of the ceremony (Williams 2004, 265; Nilsson Stutz 2008), has a limited agency in the design carried out by the living (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 29; Ekengren & Nilsson Stutz 2009, 6). During the funeral a new identity is bestowed on the dead person, suitable for his or her present condition (Ekengren 2006, 109), to which the mourners relate their identities.

A grave itself should not be viewed as a static arrangement of corpses and items, but as an outcome of a process that takes place in certain time frames. Funerals are sequences of actions that can form visible archaeological deposits (Williams 2006, 120; Ekengren 2013, 179) and the sites in which the dead were deposited are often utilized later for further burials and activities. Taphonomic processes further transform the information preserved (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 137). Finally, during the archaeological excavations attempts are made to recover it. All these processes are critical in shaping the interpretation of the particular burial context.

If the funeral ceremonies are composed of series of actions executed by the people attending them, then through studies of stratigraphy of the graves it is possible to establish a relative chronology of the events taking place at the site (Gansum & Oestigaard 2004, 69). Careful study of the burial context, with consideration of different stages of the funeral, can help in understanding the role of items discovered in the burial.

It is necessary to recognize that burial goods can be composed of objects that were personal possessions of the deceased, the tools necessary for the construction of the monument, gifts for the afterlife or means of stopping the dead from harassing the living (Brück 2004, 309; Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 7ff; Pétursdóttir 2009, 32). In any of those instances they represent conscious choices and selections undertaken by the organizers of the funeral. In that case, even objects that would normally be classified as everyday items may receive another meaning, based on their appearance and relation to other objects found in the burial context (Ekengren 2013, 182). The possible entanglement of objects, their "biography", must be also taken into account (Pétursdóttir 2009, 29) if the creation of memory through performance and material culture is viewed as the main purpose of the funeral (Williams 2006, 12).

With the above-mentioned concepts in mind I analysed the documentation of previously excavated burials in south-western Scania, dated (or possibly dating) to the Viking Age, in which cremation deposits were discovered. As cremation deposits I understand materials that could have derived from a cremation ceremony – mainly burned human and animal remains, large pieces of burned wood, but also layers of charcoal. Cremation deposits located in separated cuts in layers of the fill of the burial were excluded, as they might represent an overlying intersecting burial – a practice not uncommon for Viking Age burial grounds in south-western Scania. The practices of deposition of the cremation-related material are placed in a context of the funeral ceremony. Analysis of drawings of burial contexts, sections and the information about the level on which the recorded finds were discovered, was used to reconstruct, in very broad strokes, the sequence of the events and to reflect on the configuration of objects during the certain stages of the ceremony. Following the rule of superposition – the bottom layers will be perceived as older than the top layer – objects placed at the bottom will be the ones that were placed first in the grave, and objects found in upper layers will be generally considered as deposited at later stages (Gansum & Oestigaard 2004, 69).

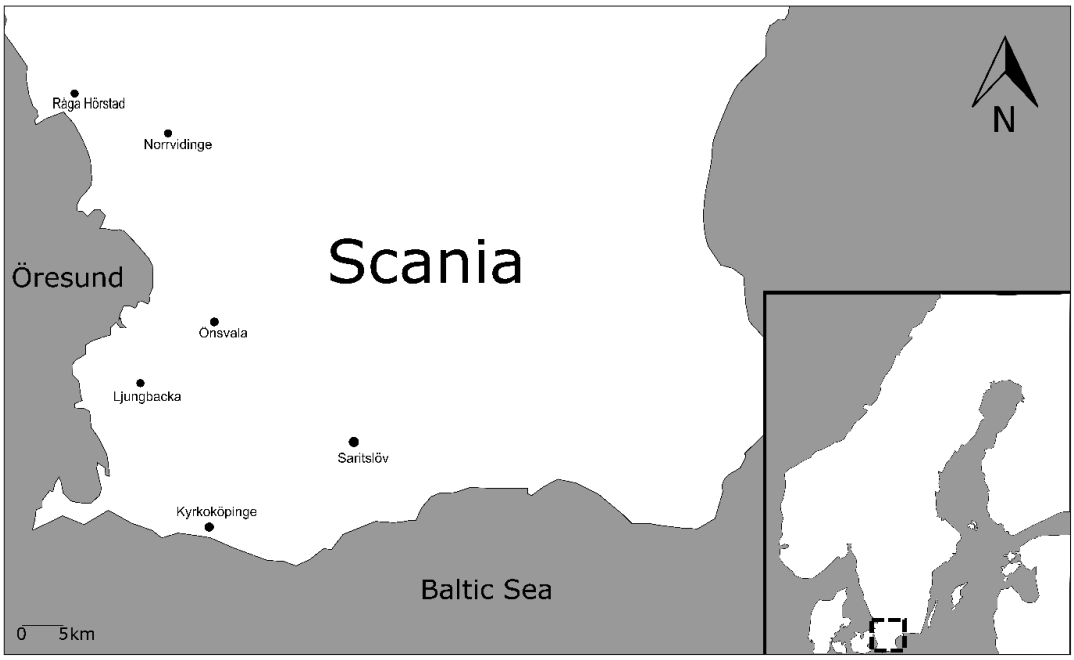

Fig. 1. Map of cemeteries in south-western Scania where pyre-related material was found in inhumation burials. Drawing by the author.

Sites in the study – material selection, dating and context

The material is derived from six sites located in south-western Scania (Fig. 1). The sites were selected to include the graves in which the aforementioned cremation deposits were present. Information about the presence of the deposit was derived mainly from the catalogue of burials provided in the second volume of Fredrik Svanberg's dissertation (2003b) with additional sites selected from earlier work by Märta Strömberg (1961b). The material described in the article stems from only one region of Scandinavia, following the opinion that modern approaches to the Late Iron Age in Scandinavia should emphasize the regional differences (Svanberg 1999, 130). The term "cremation deposit" is used to highlight the problem with the interpretation of burials. The term "grave" carries an emotional meaning in our culture (Kaliff 2005, 130) as a space where the dead were laid to rest, a final place of deposition of the human remains. There is a certain lack of consensus as to whether it should be applied to every context in which small amounts of cremated human remains were found, as one cremation can result in the creation of multiple features (McKinley 2013, 154). Regarding earlier periods, some researchers propose viewing the features in which the amount of burned bone is small as remains from different stages of the burial ritual, for example the site of the cremation pyre (Arcini 2005, 64). The term "cremation deposit" allows the inclusion of pyre-related material other than human bone in the study as well.

The region of south-western Scania is here distinguished following Charlotte Fabech's research. In her opinion, Iron Age settlements were mostly grouped on the plain areas of Scania, in the south-west and east. Those clusters were separated by an extensive area that was less densely populated (Fabech 1993, 210ff). The south-west is further treated as a

Table I. Number of graves discovered at the sites. Data based on Strömberg (1961b), Samuelsson (2001) and Svanberg (2003b).

Site	Graves no.	Cremations	Inhumations	Probably dating to the Viking Age	Number of Viking Age graves with cremation deposits
Önsvala	26	0	26	14	4
Kyrkoköpinge	7	0	7	7	1
Norrvidinge	71 (?)	1	70 (?)	24 (?)	4 (?)
Råga Hörstad	34	1	33	32	13
Saritslöv	11	2	9	11	4
Ljungbacka	191	160	31	49	20

distinct region, with regard to burial ritual, based on Svanberg's findings presented in the second volume of *Decolonizing the Viking Age*. The Viking Age south-western Scania was characterized by both cremation and inhumation, with the latter type of burials dominating, as opposed to the region in the south-east, where biritualism was also practised but with the majority of discovered burials being cremations (Svanberg 2003b, 145). Further differences are observable in the material culture discovered in the region, with jewellery such as oval, equal-armed and round brooches seldom occurring in the west, as well as a lower number of imports from western Europe discovered in eastern Scania (Svanberg 1999, 34ff). The area is mainly differentiated on the basis of archaeological findings, as the only natural boundary is the sea to the west. It is believed that a dense forest could probably have separated the area from the region of eastern and northern Scania (Svanberg 2003a, 165).

The sites in this study generally conform to the observations regarding the burial ritual proposed by Svanberg, with Önsvala solely consisting of 26 inhumation graves (Larsson 1981, 130), Kyrkoköpinge with at least seven inhumation burials (Strömberg 1961b, 58), Norrvidinge with one cremation burial and around 70 inhumations (Svanberg 2003b, 284). Similarly, one cremation burial and 34 inhumations were discovered at Råga Hörstad (Strömberg 1968, 3) and at Saritslöv where around nine inhumation burials and two cremation burials were found (Strömberg 1961b, 65 f.). The only site not conforming to the pattern is Ljungbacka[1] where 31 inhumation and 160 simple cremation burials were discovered (Samuelsson 1998, 6; Table I). This anomaly might be caused by two possible factors. First is the damage to the top archaeological strata that might have been caused by years of farming in the densely populated region of southern Scania (Thäte 2007), removing the small features such as cremation burials. Secondly, it was only at Ljungbacka that the removal of layers of topsoil was supervised by archaeologists, which allowed for documentation and identification of the features. There is evidence that there might have been more cremation burials at Råga Hörstad and Önsvala as well (Svanberg 2003b, 89 f.).

Another common feature of the cemeteries discussed is that they were used in periods preceding the Viking Age. At Ljungbacka, except for a single cremation burial dated to the Late Bronze Age, and large burial mound that was the focal point of cemetery, a number of cremation burials and an inhumation burial were dated to the Vendel Period (Samuelsson 2001, 99). Burials dated to the Late Roman Iron Age, Migration

Period and Vendel Period were discovered at Önsvala, and from the Vendel Period at Råga Hörstad (Svanberg 2003b, 293). Some of the burials from Norrvidinge possibly date to the younger parts of the Iron Age, but this problem requires further investigation, which is difficult while the results of archaeological examination of the site remain unpublished. Kyrkoköpinge and Saritslöv provided some graves that can be dated to the Viking Age as well, but others require further investigation.

The tradition of placing a cremation deposit in an inhumation burial seems to predate the Viking Age, although it must be taken into account that the graves are hard to date, as the burial equipment is meagre and few C14 dates are available so far. However, this statement can be based on the example of burial no. 3 from Önsvala where artefacts dated to the Migration Period and deposits of soot were found (Larsson 1981, 157). Possibly some of the unpublished material from Norrvidinge can be dated similarly early.

The custom seems to cease around the beginning of 11th century when the burial grounds presented in the study were abandoned. One of the few last examples is the rich wagon case burial from Önsvala – grave number 24, where a small amount of cremated human remains was found (Persson & Persson 1981, 200) probably dating to that period (Svanberg 2003b, 290). The practice might have been later continued in the tradition of charcoal burials known from church burial grounds from Lund (Lund 2013, 56), similar to those known from England (Daniel 1997, 158 f.), where the dead was placed in the grave on a layer of charcoal.

Cremation deposits – contents and problems of the intentionality of deposition

Svanberg recognized the difficulties in establishing the exact dating of burials in south-western Scania. Following the assumptions presented by Strömberg (1961a, 37) that the majority of graves equipped with knives, whetstones or without any burial goods date to the Viking Age, he estimated the amount of possible known Viking Age burials as reaching a number of around 230 (Svanberg 2003b, 87). In 44 inhumations (Table II) discovered in the region, cremation deposits were found, amounting to around 20% of burials in the area. I understand cremation deposits as materials that could have derived from funeral pyre as a result of the cremation process: burned bone, both animal and human, charred large fragments of wood and charcoal. Such an inclusive definition is necessary, because of the preliminary nature of my research and the fact that information about the exact content of many of the cremation deposits had not yet been published.

The bone fragments, when discovered in the deposits and subjected to analysis, derive both from humans and animals. At Ljungbacka and Råga Hörstad the presence of remains from dogs and sheep/goats was confirmed (Strömberg 1968; Samuelsson 2001, 92). The amount of bone material discovered is meagre, ranging from a couple of grams to around 10 g. This amount seems low, as a cremated human corpse should produce around 1500–2000 g of remains (Ulriksen 2011, 189). However, it must be recognized that in south-western Scania a very low quantities of human remains were deposited, even in regular, single cremation burials, as testified by examples from Ljungbacka where it ranges from 0.1 g to 53.6 g, and some of the features interpreted as cremation burials

seemed not to contain any human remains (Samuelsson 1998, 32). The mixing of animal remains was also recognisable in material from free-standing, single cremations from Ljungbacka, but a larger variety of species was observable with the addition of pig and poultry to the aforementioned dogs and sheep/goats (Samuelsson 1998, 32).

When such small amounts of material were mixed into a filling of a pit, the question of the intentionality of the deposition must be raised. Material similar to that described here was often considered as a result of accidental redeposition of remains from earlier cremation burials (Samuelsson 1998, 16; Ulriksen 2011, 189). Danish archaeologists, working with similar traces discovered on Zealand, had pointed to some facts that might be proof of intended placement of cremated human remains or pyre-related material in the inhumation burial.

The practice seemed to have been fairly widespread in eastern Denmark, as such material was discovered in 52% of burials excavated at a cemetery at Trekroner Grydehøj and 60% at Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken (Ulriksen 2011, 189) and over half of the 55 burials discovered at Ottestrup (Eriksen 1992, 187). More finds are known from Rytterkær (Jønsson 1992, 39), Kjølvejen (Kleinminger 1993, 129), Lejre (Wulf Andersen 1995, 99) and Forlev (Brøndsted 1936, 194).

Other factors pointing to intentional deposition are the uneven distribution of the material in the fill, which sometimes creates distinguishable layers and concentrations (Ulriksen 2011, 189) and the occurrence of pyre-related material in the burials from cemeteries without any known cremation burials or in burial groups in which no cremation burials were found (Samuelsson 1998, 17; Ulriksen 2011, 189).[2]

Modes of deposition

The description of the cremation deposits varies in the archaeological documentation, reflecting the changes in the excavation methodology and the way the material was published. Often only one of the burial levels was documented. Another limiting factor is that most of the sites mentioned in this article were previously used either for gravel extraction (Larsson 1981, 129; Strömberg 1968, 3) or agriculture (Samuelsson 1998, 6), which might have disturbed the deposits. In most cases there are no notes about the exact stratigraphic position of the deposits; only the presence of cremated human or non-human bone or wood in the fill of the burial in relation to human remains is noted.

In the case of excavations conducted in the 1920s and the 1930s at Kyrkoköpinge and Saritslöv, the deposition is described as forming a distinct layer of charcoal, located above the remains of the skeleton, as in case of grave 6 at Kyrkoköpinge (Strömberg 1961b, 58), and both above and below the skeletons, as in graves 1, 4, 9 and 10 from Saritslöv (Strömberg 1961b, 65 f.). At Kyrkoköpinge the deposit is described as quite substantial, forming over a half of the fill of the burial, reaching a thickness of around 60 cm. Similar deposits were discovered in burials from Önsvala, in graves 5 and 9. In case of the first burial no burned human remains were discovered in the deposit, but in the second case some fragments were identified as belonging to a human cranium (Larsson 1981, 181).

Cremation-related material was also discovered forming distinct patches, sometimes unnaturally regular in shape, suggesting the use of a container, possibly made from an organic substance. That was the case of graves G6 (Fig. 2) and G17 from Ljungbacka (Samuelsson 1998, 16). In both burials the deposits were visible in the fill of the burials on levels above

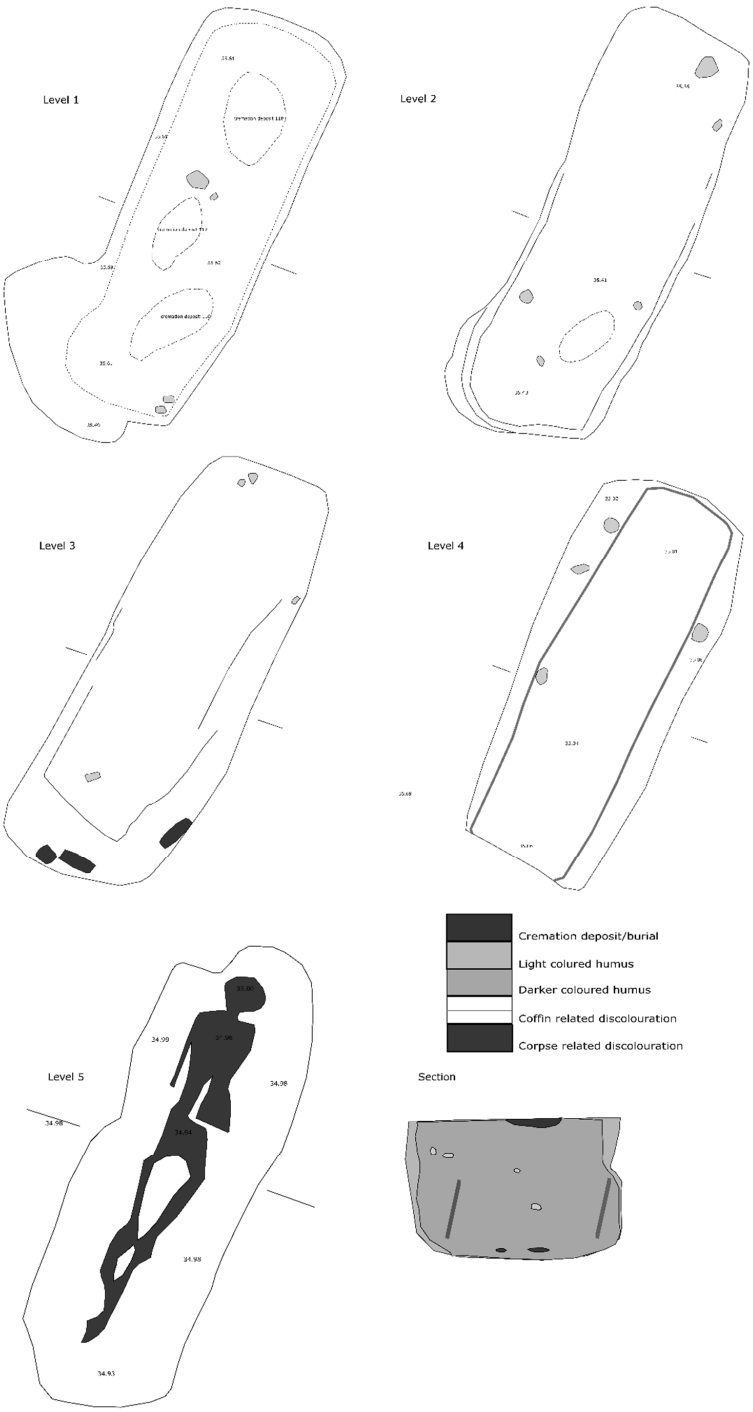

Fig. 2. Burial G6 from Ljungbaacka with rectangular cremation deposits visible at Level 2. Redrawn by the author on the basis of field documentation stored at Malmö Museum.

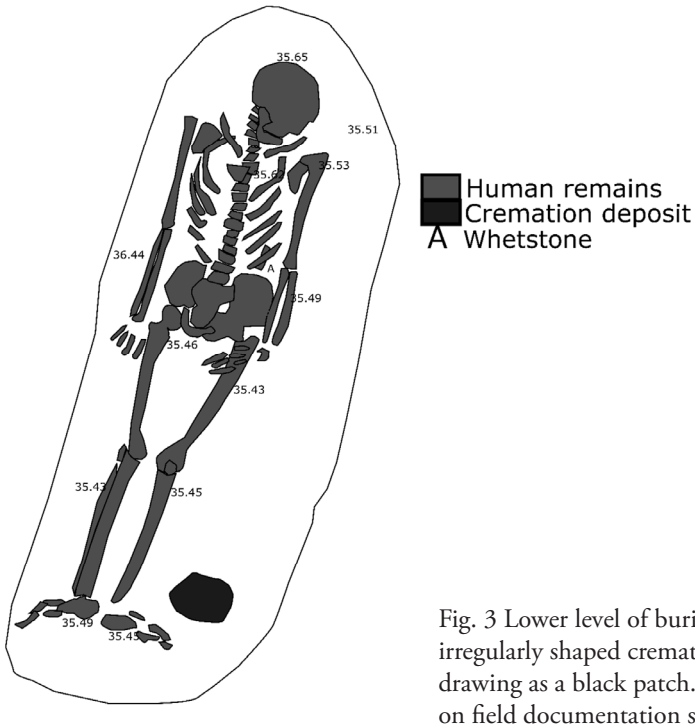

Fig. 3 Lower level of burial G28 from Ljungbacka. An irregularly shaped cremation deposit is visible on the drawing as a black patch. Redrawn by the author, based on field documentation stored at Malmö Museum.

the discolorations related to the completely decomposed skeleton of buried individuals. In the case of grave G6 burned human bones were recovered from the deposits. The complexity of burial rites related to this particular structure is further highlighted by the fact that two later cremation burials were placed over it.

Cremation deposits, not so regular in form, but still making up distinct concentrations in the burial, are also known from Ljungbacka, such as graves G18 or G28 (Fig. 3), where the deposit was found on the same level as the skeleton of the buried individual below a layer of large stones, indicating a simultaneous deposition. Similar traces of irregular shaped deposits were discovered at Norrvidinge and described as burned wood on documentation drawings, usually occupying a position above the human remains. There is no information available as to whether any burned human remains were discovered in them, except a very general description of finds from the site, in which skeletal remains damaged by fire are mentioned (Lindskog 1967). However, the charred wood by itself seems not to be an accidental mix in the fill of the burial pit, as pyre remains were observed in eight graves (G5, G16, G18, G19, G20, G22, G23, G24) discovered at Ljungbacka (Samulesson 1998, 13). Soot and charcoal were frequently observed in the fillings of burial pits at Råga Hörstad (Strömberg 1968). In two cases, grave G9 from Ljungbacka and grave 59 (Fig. 4) from Norrvidinge, large distinguishable fragments of charred wood were placed in the burial. In grave 59 it appears as if two large logs were placed over the body of the buried individual.

In the light of this evidence it is possible to observe that cremation deposits were formed not as a result of a single type of practice, but different practices. One is the creation of a layer of charcoal or burned bones, another is placing a deposit confined in a container or without it, a third is the inclusion of pyre remains in the fill of the burial. However,

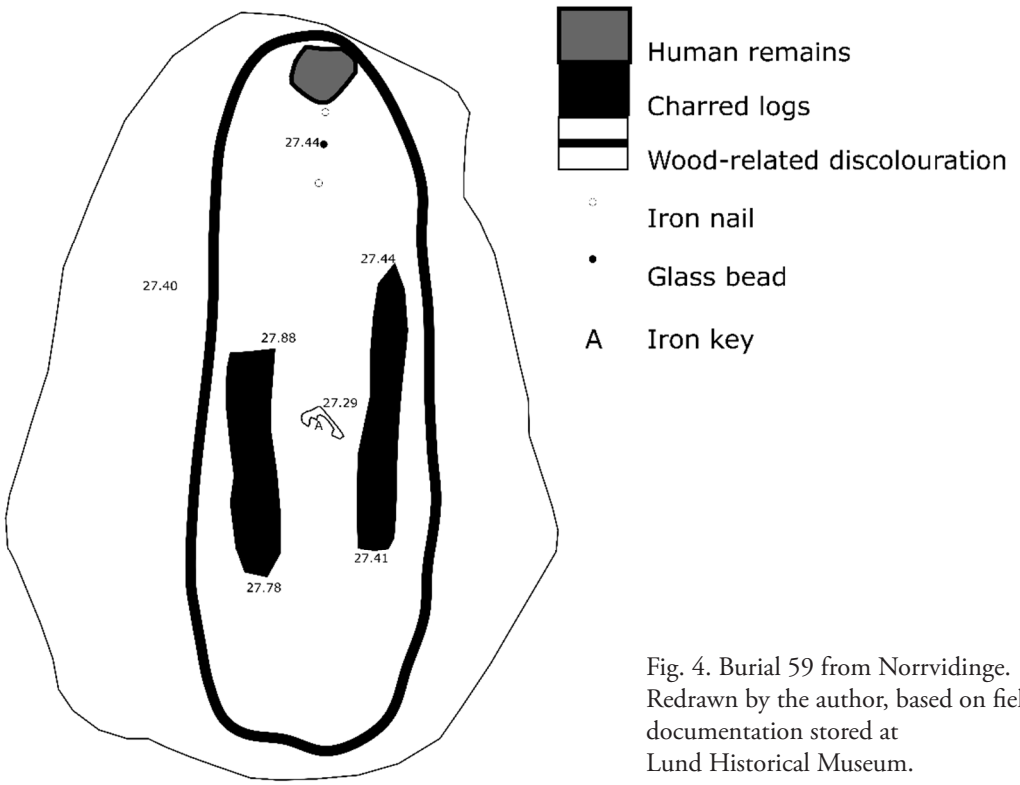

Fig. 4. Burial 59 from Norrvidinge. Redrawn by the author, based on field documentation stored at Lund Historical Museum.

the common denominator in all the types of deposition, besides the probable origin in the funeral pyre, is that it was usually placed in the burial after the body was placed in it, possibly during the time that the burial pit was filled with soil. Cases in which the deposits were later covered by stones, probably deriving from external elements of the burial, further support the hypothesis of the simultaneous deposition of the pyre-related material with the process of infilling of the inhumation grave. In some cases, when the use of a coffin was confirmed, the stratigraphic position of the deposit points towards the interpretation that it was placed in the burial when the body was no longer visible. It could be argued that since the deposits were not in direct contact with the body of the deceased they should not be viewed in the same terms as items placed on the same level as the corpse. Their inclusion took place at a different stage of the funeral, so possibly even if they contained human remains, they should be understood in different terms than human remains found at the bottom of the grave, despite the fact that at first glance they were of similar significance.

Interpretation based on written sources

Archaeology's ability to study rituals, even to identify the remains of ritualized activity (Brück 1999) has to be treated with scepticism, as only material remains of complex ceremonies are preserved. Numerous activities, such as singing, chanting, dancing and praying, do not leave any traces that can be recovered, and the material traces that are left can often be difficult to interpret, as variations or similarities might be understood completely differently in a particular cultural

context (Nordberg 2012, 131). This issue is usually addressed by employing one of two approaches. The first is to rely on written sources to explain the meaning of the archaeological remains. The second is to utilize the knowledge produced in the subject of ritual studies, functioning as a sub-discipline of social anthropology, in order to understand how the rituals might have fulfilled their functions on a more social plane, without placing so much emphasis on uncovering the direct meaning of each item or practice (Williams 2016, 402). Both approaches have their limitations, and their effectiveness is dependent mostly on how they are applied to the material.

It is my opinion that cremation deposits, if interpreted at all, were subjected to reasoning grounded mostly in the first type of approach. Ulriksen (2011, 191), confronted with similar cremation deposits at Danish burial grounds, regarded them as symbolically following the Law of Odin from Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*, which stated that the dead must be cremated, or as granting the dead a faster way to the afterlife, as explained by a mourner to ibn Fadlan in his description of a chieftain's funeral in *Risala*. According to this explanation the deposit would serve as a substitute for a whole cremation ceremony, allowing the deceased and his possessions entry to Valhalla. This interpretation is problematic in the light of recent ideas put forward by historians of religion, who are convinced that religion centred around god Odin and concept of Valhalla was practised in a restricted milieu of chieftains and their warrior retinue, not a belief or a religion shared across all geographical regions and social strata (Gunnell 2015, 56). The fact that written sources, mainly used to reconstruct a coherent form of Old Norse mythology, were mainly created by skalds and other people serving or belonging to the upper class (Back-Danielsson 2007, 34) has resulted in the reconstruction of a world view that probably would most closely reflect their ideals. Similarly, the description of the cremation of a chieftain found in *Risala* is hardly applicable, as it has an elitist character and it is separated by quite a large geographical distance from the lands of Viking Age Denmark. There is also uncertainty about the ethnic composition of the group of Rus merchants, who quite probably included Slavs and members of local nomadic tribes (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, 90) and as such might have leaned towards more syncretic burial rituals. The very uniform burial rite employed at south-western Scania burial grounds makes it difficult to connect them to any particular social sphere of Viking Age society.

Cremated slaves – buried masters?

The lack of stress on displaying hierarchy by inclusion of lavish burial goods can also create difficulties in accepting the most popular interpretation of the cremation deposits, especially those containing human remains as the result of the sacrifice of a slave during the burial ceremony (Strömberg 1968, 39 f.; Kelinminger 1993, 103; Svanberg 1999, 30; Svanberg 2003b, 89). This interpretation was most clearly presented by Svanberg, as he claims that there is a noticeable status difference between the individual subjected to inhumation and the ones cremated on the pyre. He states that there are no grave goods that could be assigned to the remains usually discovered in the fills of the inhumations (Svanberg 2003b, 89 ff.). Unfortunately, such a claim cannot be supported as it relies heavily on concept of grave goods and monument size being representative of individual status during life (Oestigaard 2006, 11; Larsson 2015, 12). Even disregarding that statement, many other issues render this interpretation dubious.

It is problematic to compare the remains that were subjected to the primary rite, deposited directly in a place in which they decomposed, with remains that were deposited after cremation and as such subjected to a funeral in multiple episodes (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 152). Archaeologists working with cremations have stressed that not all items (and not all individuals) that were placed on the funeral pyre were deposited in the soil (Williams 2008, 246).

Even if cremated remains were found in some of the burials that could be described as aristocratic or exceptionally rich, such as burial 24 from Önsvala or G18 from Ljungbacka, the burial goods that are found in inhumations with cremation deposits are usually just knives and whetstones, which does not indicate any dramatic status difference between individuals buried in the feature and suggest that the inclusion of cremation deposits is not status-related. Often cremations are considered a "poor man's burial", as at the point of discovery they appear quite modest compared to inhumation burial and present a challenge to analyse and describe correctly (Williams 2008, 239 f.). Experimental archaeology has contradicted this statement, proving that properly conducted cremation requires resources, such as wood (Høilund Nielsen 2011, 98) and certain specialist knowledge (Oestigaard 2006, 17).

Another problematic concept is an assumption that the cremation and the inhumation burials of both individuals must be simultaneous to create a cremation deposit. In the case of cremation burial, the deposition of the remains, either from the body of person who underwent it or of the funeral pyre, can be delayed (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 44). Similar deposits encountered in England in Anglo-Saxon inhumation burials from Collingbourne Ducis have been interpreted as depositions of mementos from earlier cremations (McKinley 2013).

Two criteria should be fulfilled to present a burial context as a result of funerary sacrifice – there must be evidence of primary rite deposition of remains of at least two individuals and there must be visible signs of peri-mortem trauma in one of the sets of the remains. In my opinion, inhumation burials with cremation deposits do not fulfil these criteria and as such cannot be presented as the results of human sacrifice and ascribed rank.

Performing kinship

New trends in archaeology, drawing heavily on social anthropological research allow for a different approach towards cremation deposits. If the modern western concept of the individual is abandoned (Lund 2013, 48) it is possible to look at cremated bone as a substance (Fowler 2004, 50ff). Remains interpreted as cremated human bone have been often discovered in Late Iron Age Scandinavia outside burial contexts including cooking pits, hearths, property borders, thresholds and postholes (Back Danielson 2007, 245). Bones of undefined species were also found to have been used as temper in the production of ceramics discovered at Gudme and Uppåkra (Jennbert 2004, 201) and were possibly used in the process of carbonization of steel (Gansum 2007, 138). It is possible, that the cremation deposits, not always containing human remains, do not signify a person but are rather a form of tool necessary in a transformative act such as a funeral.

A funeral is mainly an affair that concerns the living, as it serves as a mean of reforging social relationships and transmission of property and social functions (Oestigaard 2000, 53). Rituals also played an important role as they reinforced cultural boundaries and institutions (Artelius & Svanberg 2005, 5 ff.; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 31; Hull 2014, 2) and provided oral societies with a sense of

continuity, past and social identity through the relation to the dead (Assman 1998, 78). Scandinavia in the Late Iron Age could be described as a mainly oral culture (Brink 2005, 67b). As such, the approach to the past was different from that in literate societies, as only events important for the present situation were remembered (Back Danielson 2007, 32), and the past could be altered in narrative to better suit the needs of the current situation. In such contexts it is important to consider the role of human remains as artefacts that possess a power of memory creation important for establishing the social order, through their connection to the biography and identity of an individual (Williams 2006, 114ff; Hedeager 2010, 111), but possibly they should be also considered as a means of creating a social connection.

Recent trends in social anthropology have developed culture-specific approaches to the question of kinship, recognizing that biological reproduction might be understood as a central subject in modern western culture (Schneider 1972; Carsten 2000, 3 f.). Biological facts should not be confused with cultural facts (Yanagisako & Collier 1987) – it is important to recognize that different cultures might have different ideas about human reproduction.[3] The creation of an individual could be a result of interaction of large numbers of people during multiple events, not only sexual in nature (Beckerman & Valentine 2002; Weismantel 2004). Kinship has to be considered as something that can be constructed or is in large part a matter of performance (Carsten 1995), and does not only consider living individuals, as in some cultures the dead can marry people or even become parents (Stone 2010).

In fact, written sources – sagas and myths – illuminate situations where broadly defined kinship links are created through performative action in cases such as foster-parenthood or oath-taking (*Gísla saga Súrssonar* and the case of Gisli, Thorkel, Vesteinn and Thorgrim) or blood brotherhood (in the case of Odin and Loki known from mythology). Even the dead can enter into kin relations through marriage, as described by Al-Masudi, in the case of the death of an unmarried man (Jesch 1994, 119 ff.). In all these examples the establishing of the relation takes place through ritualized behaviour. Furthermore, the terminology on many rune stones should be mentioned, where men refer to dead members of the same retinue as *sword brothers* (Varenius 1998, 24 ff.), which may point to the existence of a sort of kinship ties created by service as a warrior. A story of the retrieval of grave goods from the mound of King Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr and their passing to the mother of the later king, Óláfr Haraldsson, as told in *Flateyjarbók*, can be also perceived as a situation in which kinship ties are created through interaction with the dead (Klevnäs 2016, 469). At the same time, the practice of infanticide and the ceremony of presenting the child to its father testify that being born in a family did not secure a place in it (Jochens 1995, 81 ff.).

When social identities are considered as relational – existing only through interaction among people – it might be fruitful to consider the cremation deposits as acts of kinship building, perhaps through the utilization of the remains of the dead or maybe between the dead themselves. Those relations might have considered the created dead personas of the deceased, as a tool to reach the state required to properly enter the afterlife, but the possibility that those relations had certain repercussions for the living should not be excluded. For some reasons, employment of human remains to create ties between people is considered a suitable interpretation regarding finds dated to the Bronze Age and Stone Age (Jennbert 2004, 196), but not for the Late Iron Age. This can be related to the process of viewing this part of Scandinavian prehistory as more familiar and more related to modern ways of conduct, as often it is viewed as one of the roots

of modern European societies (Oestigaard 2011). The evidence of burial practice from south-western Scanian cemeteries, indicating the opening of the burials, deposition of human body parts and placing burials in intentional intersection with others (Satalecki 2014), suggests an approach to the dead completely different from the modern one.

Conclusion

The substantial number of cremation deposits discovered in inhumation burials requires much more research, beyond the scope of this preliminary article. New research questions arises as the evidence points towards the important role of cremation in burial rituals conducted in the region – even if the majority of discovered Viking Age burials are inhumations. The fact that people were subjected to such differentiated treatment after death, with bodies of individuals preserving their integrity in the soil and others cremated and buried or used only as a token deposit, points to differences in the understanding of personhood. Discussing the Scandinavian Late Iron Age, where concepts of transformation and fluidity between humans, animals (Mansurd 2006; Hedeager 2010; Jennbert 2011) and objects (Back Danielson 2007; Gansum 2007) seem to be recurring subjects, the possibility that human remains can become a tool in a ritual should receive more attention. Similar traces have been interpreted before as signs of an ancestor cult (Nielsen 1991), but maybe they should be rather seen as a means of creating an ancestor, and through that, a reference point in a network establishing the social identities of the mourners.

Of course any debate centred on theoretical concepts cannot take place in separation from the actual archaeological finds and contexts. One of the biggest challenges is systematic osteological analysis of the excavated material in order to identify the species, the lowest possible number of individuals and what body parts are most often represented in the burials. Re-examination and detailed publication of sites excavated over twenty years ago would make the material more accessible, as now it is mostly confined to museum stores. Attempts to create a better chronology of changes in burial ritual in Late Iron Age Scania, more oriented towards observation of small details, could illuminate a number of questions related to the variation in ritual observable at the burial grounds considered here. Danish research (Ulriksen 2011) clearly shows how beneficial the publication and interpretation of excavation results from recently discovered and examined sites is, when burials are excavated with special attention to the stratigraphy of the fills of the burial pit. Similar research is still lacking from Sweden. At the same time, the scientific effort cannot be carried out in isolation from the research about the nature of Late Iron Age kinship and the nature of personhood, as it can lead to the projection of modern concepts on past populations.

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Notes

1 The site is also known in literature as Lockarp (Svanberg 2003b, 290), but here the nomenclature used before in *Lund Archaeological Review* (Samuelsson 2001) is utilized.

2 Although these arguments are quite convincing, they fail to address an issue of transfer of

material that could derive from periods preceding the Iron Age. In some of the burial fills from Råga Hörstad pieces of flint tools and ceramics were found (Strömberg 1968) and at Önsvala (Larsson 1981) and Norrvidinge remains of Bronze Age settlements were discovered between the graves.

3 I am not postulating that people during the Viking Age did not see the sexual intercourse between a man and a woman as a part of a reproductive process; textual sources recorded in later medieval times suggest that the connection was recognized (Jochens 1995, 65 ff.). The matter of inquiry is the social reception of this observation and its importance for creation of kinship ties.

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Table II. List of graves with cremation deposits from south-western Scania included in the study.

Grave	Cremation deposit	Grave goods	Other relevant information	Dating
Ljungbacka G1	Burned human bones (11.8 g) discovered in the fill of the pit, without clear demarcation	Knife, sandstone spindle whorl	Cut by later cremation burial	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G2	Two cremation deposits including human bone (0.5 g) present in the fill of the burial	Whetstone, knife, ceramics	Cut by two later cremation burials. Visible outlines of a coffin	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G3	Irregular shaped cremation deposits visible in the fill of the burial, with burned human bone (3.8 g) present	Two knives, ceramics	Three large stones found in the fill of the burial	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G5	Cremated remains mixed into the fill of the burial. Burned human bone (3.4 g) present	Knife, ceramics		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G6	Visible cremation deposits in regular rectangular shape, suggesting the presence of an organic container. Human bone (0.9 g) present		Visible coffin outline, grave cut by later cremation burials	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G9	Visible deposit of pyre remains consisting of charred planks and branches	Knife	Over the level on which the deposit was present discolorations probably related to a stone setting were found	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G16	Burned bone and charcoal present in the fill of the burial	Knife	Visible coffin outline	Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G17	Rectangular shaped cremation deposits visible at a lower level of the burial		Visible coffin outlines	Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G18	Small concentrations of burned bone (20.8 g identified as human) discovered in the fill of the burial	Axe head (Petersen type M), knife, whetstone, bonze bead, bronze plate, iron rivet	Unburned bones of a lamb discovered in the burial. Two cremation burials later cut into the pit.	First half of the 10th C.

Grave	Cremation deposit	Grave goods	Other relevant information	Dating
Ljungbacka G19	Charcoal and burned bones (3.1 g human) discovered in the fill of the burial pit	Knife, ceramics		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G20	Charcoal and burned bones (0.8 g identified as human) discovered in the fill of the pit	Two iron nails, ceramics		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G21	Small layer of charcoal and burned bones deposited in the fill of the burial	Pottery vessel, iron nail, whetstone, knife, iron object, penannular bronze brooch	Burial heavily disturbed during excavation, remains of two individuals discovered	10th C.
Ljungbacka G22	Charcoal and burned bones discovered in the fill of the pit	Knife and a clasp knife	Pit damaged by a later feature	Vendel/Viking Age
Ljungbacka G23	Charcoal and cremated bone (4.3 g identified as human) discovered in the fill of the pit	Two iron knives – one with the bottom individual, other with the upper individual, spurs with silver inlay, two unidentified iron objects, whetstone	Burial of at least two individuals, of which one is traditionally interpreted as sacrificed slave	Second half of 10th – to first half of 11th C.
Ljungbacka G24	Two irregular cremation deposits in the fill of the burial with human burn bone present (6.4 g identified as human)	Unidentified iron object	Burial of at least two individuals on two levels, heavily disturbed	Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G27	Burned bone and charcoal mixed into the fill of the pit	Knife, unidentified iron object		Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Ljungbacka G28	Burned bone, charcoal and soot were present in the fill of the burial. At the lower level next to a skeleton, a cremation deposit of irregular shape was found. Burned human bones were found in the grave (8.5 g)	Two unidentified iron objects, knife and a whetstone	In the burial four large stones were found. At the top levels uncremated human remains were discovered	Iron Age/Probably Viking Age
Ljungbacka G29	Charcoal was found mixed into the fill of the pit	Knife and two iron rivets	Outline of coffin was visible in the burial	Iron Age/Probably Viking Age
Ljungbacka G30	Cremated bone (15.4 g human), soot and charcoal mixed in the fill of the burial	Yellow glass bead, two unidentified iron objects	Burial damaged by a later feature	Late Iron Age/Probably Viking Age

Grave	Cremation deposit	Grave goods	Other relevant information	Dating
Önsvala grave 5	Layer of cremated bone and soot located above the skeleton, large piece of charcoal deposited in the burial	Blue glass bead, Iron knife	Visible traces of coffin	Viking Age
Önsvala grave 9	Layer of cremated bone and soot located above the skeleton. Some bone fragments identified as human	Knife, pottery		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Önsvala grave 16	Cremated human bone found in the fill of the pit	Pottery, fragmentary preserved iron object	Visible traces of coffin	Viking Age (C14 dating)
Önsvala grave 24	Cremated human bone found in the fill of the burial	Bronze brooch, orange glass bead, iron knife, textile fragments with silver and gold thread decoration, pottery	Burial in the wagon case	First half of the 11th c.
Råga Hörstad grave 2	Charcoal fragments discovered in the fill of the burial	Knife, whetstone, belt buckle	Uncremated human remains found in the fill of the burial, as well as pottery and flint fragments	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 3	Charcoal fragments and soot discovered in the fill of the burial	Knife	Human mandible discovered in the fill of the burial	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 4	Charcoal, soot and cremated human bone discovered in the fill of the burial	Knife, ceramics, whetstone	Flint fragments discovered in the fill of the burial	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 5	Charcoal, soot and burned bone fragments discovered in the pit of the burial	knife	Pottery pieces and burned clay discovered in the fill of the burial	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 6	Soot discovered in the fill of the burial	Ringed pin, two iron knives and dog skeleton	Pottery pieces and human cranial bones found in the fill of the burial	Beginning of the Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 7a	Soot discovered in the fill of the burial			Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 7b	Soot discovered in the fill of the burial			Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 10	Cremated bone discovered in the fill of the burial	Knife and whetstone	Pottery fragments and flint fragments discovered in the fill of the burial	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age

Grave	Cremation deposit	Grave goods	Other relevant information	Dating
Råga Hörstad grave 11	Cremation burial located in the fill of the pit. Soot, charcoal, burned bones, as well as three big stones found present in the fill of the pit.	Amber bead, blue, yellow and green glass beads, traces of textiles	Cremation deposit possibly not simultaneous with the burial, visible traces of a coffin	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 12	Soot, fire cracked stones and charcoal found in the fill of the burial	Knife, two whetstones	Pottery pieces, human teeth and animal bones found in the fill of the burial. Visible traces of coffin	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Råga Hörstad grave 26	Soot discovered in the fill of the pit, cremation deposit in a corner of the pit	Fragments of Iron object	Deposit might not be simultaneous with the burial	Late Iron Age/Probably Viking Age
Norrvidinge grave 3	Irregular cremation deposit in the fill of the burial	Pottery vessel		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Norrvidinge grave 18	Two cremation deposits of irregular shape discovered in the fill of the burial pit	Textile fragments decorated with silver and gold thread, weaving sword, at least 10 glass beads	Visible traces of a burial mound. Possibly a burial in a wagon case. Large stones discovered in the fill of the burial pit	Viking Age
Norrvidinge grave 21	Two irregular shaped cremation deposits visible in the burial	Knife	Visible traces of a coffin	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Norrvidinge grave 59	Two charred logs placed in the fill of the pit	Glass bead, key	Visible traces of coffin	Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Kyrkoköpinge grave 6	A layer of charcoal in the fill of the burial located above the skeleton	Knife, whetstone		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Saritslöv grave 1	Layer of charcoal discovered in the fill of the burial above the skeleton	Comb		Viking Age
Saritslöv grave 4	Layer of charcoal discovered in the fill of the pit	Knife, whetstone		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Saritslöv grave 6	Layer of charcoal located above and below human remains	Unidentified iron object		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Saritslöv grave 9	Layer of charcoal deposited under the skeleton			Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age
Saritslöv grave 10	Layer of charcoal located under the skeleton	Knife, ferrule		Late Iron Age/Possibly Viking Age